CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

MR. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM, visiting our shores, has been asked why he was not lecturing. His explanation, "Because I have nothing to say," naturally elicited the retort: "But that should not deter you." Allusion has already been made in these paragraphs to certain of our lecturing English literary visitors of the present moment, and also to the visits of Thackeray and Dickens. Let us not forget another lecturing visit that, just forty years ago, really stirred the country. Early in 1882 Oscar Wilde, sunflower and all, came over to tell us all about deportment and to warn us against the crudities of life.

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ARRIVING by the steamship Arizona, Wilde was met at the New York Quarantine by the ubiquitous reporter and furnished columns of copy for the newspapers throughout the country the following morning. His first lecture, on "The English Renaissance," was delivered at Chickering Hall, New York city. He was attired in short breeches and silk stockings, but he did not carry the expected sunflower or lily. Of the lecture a writer in the New York *Nation* said: "Mr. Wilde is essentially a foreign product and can hardly succeed in this country. What he has to say is not new, and his extravagance is not extraordinary enough to amuse the average American audience. His knee breeches and long hair are good as far as they go; but Bunthorne has really spoiled the public for Wilde."

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IT was in Boston that Wilde had the adventure that has often been retold. The audience at his first lecture there was large, but not exactly a representative one. It was made up mostly of the curious, who had been attracted by the announcement that a group of Harvard undergraduates, dressed up in a burlesque of the "æsthetic costume," were to be present. The masqueraders waited till Wilde had reached the platform and then trooped in in single file. There were sixty youths in the procession, and all were dressed in swallowtail coats, knee breeches, flowing wigs and green ties. They all wore large lilies in their buttonholes, and every man carried a huge sunflower as he limped along.

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SIXTY front seats had been reserved for the Harvard contingent, and to a general shout of laughter they filed into their places. The effect that they wished to produce was, however, somewhat spoiled by the fact that Wilde had for that occasion discarded his eccentric costume and appeared in ordinary evening dress, so that those of the audience to whom his usual appearance was not familiar entirely missed the point that the Harvard students wished to make. In addition, Wilde completely turned the tables by proceeding with his lecture with great dignity. He crowned his triumph by offering the Harvard students a statue of a Greek athlete to stand in the Harvard gymnasium.

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"ONE Man's View" is the recent addition to the new edition of the works of Leonard Merrick that is being issued, volume by volume, by the E. P. Dutton Company. While perhaps not to be compared with "Conrad in Quest of His Youth," "The Position of Peggy Harper" or "The Actor Manager," "One Man's View" is a fine novel, for with the possible exception of "The House of Lynch," or "Lynch's Daughter" (both titles have been used) Leonard Merrick never wrote a novel that was not a fine novel. Many years ago Dr. (later Sir William) Robertson Nicoll said: "A new book by Leonard Merrick is a literary event." Yet the English reading public, preferring Garvice and finding the intellectual stimulation it needed in the London newspaper called the *News of the World*, condemned Merrick to an existence only a little happier than that of George Gissing. It was in the United States that his merit found recognition, and Merrick is one Englishman who is appreciative. Eighteen months ago an American writing man in London saw much of Merrick. The two dined together frequently, and Merrick, invariably insisting on doing more than his share of the entertaining, met protest with the laughing argument: "This is American money."

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THERE are still a good many persons unacquainted with, or inadequately acquainted with, the stories of Leonard Merrick, and to write about his qualities as an entertainer is not to exploit an individual, but to offer suggestion that is very much worth while. To illustrate: Suppose you were traveling and fell in with a group of English people, none of whom knew anything about the tales of O. Henry. Would it not be the natural and friendly thing to tell them what they had missed, and to talk a little glowingly about "A Municipal Report" and "An Unfinished Story" and "The Defeat of the City," and "The Rose of Dixie," although the last named story is one that no English person could ever possibly grasp? It is exactly in that spirit that the admirer of Merrick buttonholes you to talk about "The Bishop's Comedy," which one of the most popular of living American novelists considers the best short story written in the last thirty years, or "The Tragedy of a Comic Song," or "The Back of Bohemia," or "The Prince in the Fairy Tale." Just in that way and not by reviews or publishers advertising has Merrick's American popularity been made. Four or five men are sitting about a table in a club, or in the smoking room of a transatlantic liner, or as many women lounging in easy chairs on a hotel veranda. The particular scene is immaterial. Some one asks: "Have you read Leonard Merrick?"—and then "Do you remember, in Conrad?" or "Do you recall the day that Tricotrin spent in London?"

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IF Mr. MERRICK had created no other character, Tricotrin, who has been called "the most delightful Bohemian in the literature of the last two decades," would entitle him to a distinguished place in contemporary fiction. Americans were the first to recognize the charm of George du Maurier's "Trilby," that tale of the Bohemia of Paris in the sixties; and Americans were the first to acclaim Tricotrin. Tricotrin before the war lived up six flights of stairs, in an attic of Montmartre. He was a poet whose poems were unprinted, just as his friend Pitou was a musician whose music was never played, as his friend Flamont was a painter whose paintings were never sold or exhibited, and as his friend Lajeunie was a playwright whose pieces were never produced. Tricotrin had an uncle, a silk manufacturer of Lyons, who wished the young man to embark in trade. That was to be his eventual fate. But in the meantime he preferred to remain in his attic, dining on a herring, flaunting his long hair and his shabby clothes on the boulevards, and building fine dreams of fortune and renown.

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THERE was one tale in which Tricotrin was pictured in the brief enjoyment of a little prosperity writing a weekly Paris theatrical letter for a newly established paper in a remote town. Dining on his herring, his imagination had free play. In his opinion he discreetly agreed with the *Figaro*, but in his paragraphs he "supped" and "chatted" with all sorts of prominent artists. His invisible telephone was a fountain of inspiration. "To-morrow," he confided, "Yvette Guilbert is going to ring me up the moment she returns from London to tell me her worries and ask my advice. As she will be prostrated by the journey, I am not sure but that, 'yielding to her entreaties,' I may even 'jump into an auto taxi and take potluck in her delightful home.'" Of course the day came when the editor of the remote paper decided to visit Paris, counting on Tricotrin introducing him to some of the celebrities of literature and the stage. The poet, at his wits' ends, called on his friends for help. They responded nobly, all except Lajeunie, who selfishly refused to shave his head in order that Tricotrin might introduce him as Edmond Rostand. Without telling the story, it may be said that Tricotrin's honor was saved and that the visiting editor returned to Montbonne delighted and impressed.

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THE life of Leonard Merrick has been reflected in his books. He was born in London, and he was destined for the bar. Several of his heroes were in the same case. His father encountered financial reverses, and at an early age the son had to face life on his own account. Another familiar phase of his stories. At the age of 18 he went to South Africa, where he worked first superintending the labors of Zulus and Kaffirs in the diamond mines, and later in the local court house. See "The Lady and the Laurels" and other stories of the same setting. Then he went to Kimberley, worked in a solicitor's office for two years, began writing, and finally, at the age of 21, drifted back to England for Grub Street and to "go on the stage." He had no theatrical connections or acquaintances, and for that reason was so much the better qualified to write about the adventures of the heroes of his two most important novels of theatrical life, "The Position of Peggy Harper" and "The Actor Manager."

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IN the American writing life of the day the name of Norris is having its fair share of attention, Charles Norris's "Brass" continuing to provoke discussion, and Mrs. Charles (Kathleen) Norris's new novel, "Lucretia Lombard," announced for early publication by Doubleday, Page & Co. Mrs. Norris's first story was written as a direct result of the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. She was living in Mill Valley, about an hour's trip from San Francisco, at the time, and after the earthquake friends began to stream into the valley for shelter. Some of them were of a literary turn, and it was felt that the time had come to send descriptive articles to the Eastern editors. Of a dozen such articles sent that of Mrs. Norris was the only one returned. So she sat down and wrote a story, "What Happened to Alanna." That, too, came back regularly with printed slips, so she gave up fiction and went into Red Cross work. Years later her husband, Charles Norris, found "What Happened to Alanna" and sent it privately to twenty editors. Then, after a due wait, he took the alphabeted list and sent it out again, this time in duplicate. Two editors accepted it at the same time, the story eventually appearing in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

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THERE was another member of the Norris family who should not be forgotten, the brilliant Frank Norris, who wrote "McTeague," "Moran of the Lady Letty," "The Octopus" and "The Pit," and who died almost twenty years ago, when he was barely beyond his thirtieth year. The last two books belonged to a trilogy, but he did not live to write "The Wolf," which was to show the wheat that had been gathered in "The Octopus" and sold in "The Pit," reaching its destination in hungry Europe. Frank Norris was an avowed disciple of Zola. He insisted upon some great central symbol that would bind a novel together into one firmly knit whole. In "McTeague" the symbol is gold; the whole book is filled with a flood of yellow light. "McTeague" was a California novel, and gold the most fitting symbol the author could devise for that State. Later he grew more ambitious. A single State no longer satisfied him. He wanted a symbol that would sum up American life. His friends used to tell of the day when he came to his office trembling with excitement, incapacitated for work, his brain concentrated on a single thought, his "Triology of the Wheat." "I have got the big idea, the biggest I ever had," was the burden of all he had to say for many a day after.

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DURING Frank Norris's last year in New York one of his close friends was Edwin Lefevre, the author of "Wall Street Stories." It was at one time agreed that Mr. Lefevre should revise the proofs of "The Pit" in all the chapters relating to the wheat market. Frequently, at Norris's request, Lefevre explained the intricacies of stock markets, and one night he found himself launched upon a description of a panic. He pictured the pandemonium on the floor of the exchange, the groups of frenzied, yelling brokers, the haggard faces of men to whom the next change of a point meant ruin. Then he followed one man in particular through the day, and showed him groping his way blindly out of the gallery a broken, ruined man. So far Lefevre had told only what he had often seen. But at this point, carried away by the story, he invented a dramatic conclusion, and told how the man was still striding restlessly, aimlessly along the corridor when the elevator shot past him and some one shouted "Down!" and the ruined man, his mind still bent upon the falling market, continued his nervous striding, gesticulating fiercely and repeating, "Down! down! down!" "There you are!" interrupted Norris. "That is one of the things that no novelist could invent!" "Yet," said Lefevre in telling the story, "it was the one bit of fake in the whole description."

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AT 17 years of age Frank Norris, intending to be an artist, went to France and enrolled as a student in the "Atelier Julien" in Paris. There he remained two years and became absorbed not in art but in chivalry. The reading of Froissart's "Chronicles" was his daily recreation. He became so imbued with the spirit of medievalism that once he pointed out an error in Scott's "Ivanhoe" in which one of the characters is described as wearing a kind of armor that was not in use until a hundred years later, a mistake that was as obvious to him as if some one to-day should depict Louis XIV. in a top hat and frock coat. It was in those Paris days that Frank Norris began to write. According to the author of "Brass" the early writing ventures were more to provide a vehicle for his illustrations than for any interest he had in writing itself. Thus it was that Frank's first novel, "Robert d'Artois," was written.

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THE rest of the Norris family returned to California, leaving Frank to follow his art studies in Paris. Correspondence between Frank and Charles took the form of a novel written by Frank in which all their favorite characters appeared revolving about Charles, who was described as the nephew of the Duke of Burgundy. The story was written in the second person, on closely ruled note paper. It was sent to America in chapters, rolled up inside French newspapers, to save postage. Every installment was profusely illustrated with pencil sketches, mostly of Charles as an esquire, a man-at-arms, an equerry, and finally as a knight. Plots and episodes from the works of Scott, Stockton and others were lifted bodily; sometimes the actual wording was borrowed. There was one sentence, "The night closed down as dark as a wolf's mouth," that years later Charles found again in the opening of "Quentin Durward." The story was never finished, but a reflection of those Paris days is to be found in the dedication of "The Pit."

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ANNOUNCEMENT has just been made of the O. Henry Memorial Award for the short stories of 1921. Sixteen short stories were selected by the Society of Arts and Sciences. From these were chosen, as the winner of the first prize of $500, "The Heart of Little Shikara," by Edison Marshall, and as winner of the second prize of $250, "The Man Who Cursed the Lilies," by Charles Tenney Jackson. This department of THE HERALD Book Section will discuss these stories and others in the collected volume in a later issue.

Authors' Works and Their Ways

Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" and Frank Norris's "The Pit" are among the selections from American literature which Maxim Gorki has included in his list of the world's best literature that he plans to make accessible to Russians through translation. The proportion of books chosen from leading nations is interesting, if not flattering, to Americans: "Belgium, 1; Portugal, 2; America, 3; Spain, 6; Norway, 7; Denmark, 8; Sweden, 9; England, 14; Italy, 18; Germany, 22, and France, 23."

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"The Bracegirdle," by Burris Jenkins, just published, is the intimate story of Anne Bracegirdle, one of the famous characters of the London stage in the seventeenth century. Anne, who was commonly called "The Darling" and the "Diana of the English Stage," was a player at the Theater Royal in Drury Lane, London. Her beauty and generosity, her resistless charm and force of character, endeared her to all who came under her spell—high and low, rich and poor. The butchers and hucksters of Clare Market were her sworn protectors, and the nobles of the court her persistent suitors. Even King William himself paid homage to her dauntless courage and brilliant mental qualities.

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Stephen French Whitman, whose new novel, "Sacrifice," was reviewed two weeks ago in THE NEW YORK HERALD, is in Paris at present with plans formed for going in the near future to the Italian Riviera, to Florence and to Rome for the gathering of "color" to be incorporated in fictional efforts which will follow his "Sacrifice." In Paris he has gathered material "for an old pet, a romantic comedy," which he wishes to do soon. Going behind the scenes of both the Comedie Francais and the Follies Bergeres in one evening he reports as "rather a contrast."

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Under the auspices of the Poets' Guild of Christodora House on Tompkins Square, New York, a series of Poets' Readings will be given on Monday evenings, March 13, 20 and 27, and April 3, 10 and 17 at 8:30. Each poet will read his own verse and will give a talk on the art of poetry. The poets reading in this series are as follows: Charles Hanson Towne, March 13; Edwin Markham, March 20; Miss Margaret Widdemer, March 27; Mrs. Marguerite Wilkinson, April 3; William Rose Benet, April 10; Miss Angela Morgan, April 17.

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Henry Wysham Lanier, whose "A Century of American Banking" is reviewed in this issue, began his work as a history of the oldest trust company. He found he had stumbled into a wealth of material that reconstructed in detail the life of that strange little town, New York, in 1822, when pigs jostled the pedestrians on Wall street and Washington Square was a potter's field. But New York was doing business. When he finished Mr. Lanier had written a history of New York's banking with all the background of conditions and personalities from which it grew.

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The Duttons announce for early publication the fourth and final volume of the series of "The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero," which Clayton Hamilton has edited, with introductions and critical and biographical comment. The forthcoming volume will contain the two plays "Mid-Channel" and "The Thunderbolt."

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Pierre Benoit's "Salt Lake," published in France under the title "Le Lac Sale," sold over 150,000 before the end of 1921. Its appearance there was the occasion for a storm of criticisms from the French press.

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"Cytherea," Joseph Hergesheimer's novel, has been sent to press for its seventh printing by the publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, making a total of 48,000 copies since publication January 3.